

BOOK REVIEW

The action plan for Australian butterflies. By D. P. A. Sands and T. R. New. Environment Australia, Canberra; October 2002; v + 377 pp. ISBN 0642548498. Available from Environment Australia, GPO Box 787, Canberra, ACT 2601.

In the past, butterfly conservation in Australia, particularly Queensland, has been a largely legislative affair based on little or no scientific evidence. The inclusion of many common or vagrant species on protected lists has served to undermine credibility in the process, whereas severe restrictions placed on collecting have inhibited further study of species genuinely or potentially in need of conservation.

This volume effectively redresses these deficiencies, providing solid scientific evidence for inclusion of species in conservation categories based on IUCN criteria. Much of the base data for the species assessments was gathered from amateur enthusiasts during a series of workshops held throughout the country. These are the very people most affected, adversely and unnecessarily, by restrictive legislation based on species lists rather than habitat reserves.

Of the 654 butterfly species and subspecies recognised by the authors, synopses discuss the conservation concerns attributed previously to 219 taxa [220 stated in text but there is no number 174]. This covers the bulk of the report and includes costings for species where further research or conservation measures are considered necessary. Significantly, three common species long known to be of no conservation significance despite legislation since the 1970s, *Ornithoptera euphorion*, *O. priamus* and *Papilio ulysseus*, are recommended for deletion from protective lists. Allowing new enthusiasts to collect and study these showy species in the wild may well help foster an appreciation of the natural environment (as it did with the present reviewer before legislation), leading to a future generation of conservationists.

The total budget suggested for research, surveys and restoration work needed for species of concern does not include land acquisition costs but, at \$2,369,300, is well below that recommended for similar work on vertebrates such as birds (Endersby 2003). It seems a small price to pay for conservation within a group of insects often regarded as of flagship importance in environmental quality assessments.

Two appendices provide National, State and Municipal recommendations for 26 taxa considered threatened (critically endangered, endangered and vulnerable) and a further 79 taxa considered of lower risk or data deficient. A third appendix tabulates distribution and previous threat assessments for all 654 taxa. This work is a valuable and highly recommended addition to the library of everyone interested in butterflies and/ or conservation.

Reference

ENDERSBY, I. 2003. [Review of] Action plan for Australian butterflies. *Victorian Entomologist* 33(2): 18-21.

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